## THE SIX DUMB-BELLS OF CASTLE SCHRECKENSTROHM.

BY DAVID SKAATS FOSTER.

Author of "A Crisis in Oldendorf." (Copyright, 1896, by the Bacheller Syndicate.)

## Part I.

How like human nature was the nature of that fex who, having through some misfortune lost his tail, tried to persuade all his brother foxes to the same curtailment! The reason of my making this philosophic reflection will appear as the present story

is developed. This is not a study of character, an analysis of motives, an autopsy of ideas. It is to his dismay that it was nalf-bast 9 simply a narrative, a stringing together of o'clock. For two hours he had been parted incidents, of rapid changes and of swift happenings, in the order in which they occurred.

Furthermore, every word, every lota of what I have here set down, is the truth, the bare and naked truth. Some of these incidents may appear, to the prosaic and humdrum reader, as somewhat startling. as being improbable, and inclining toward the supernatural. Startling and fantastic they may be, improbable they may seem, but I hold that they are in every sense and strictly possible, and that they follow exactly and in every particular the im-mutable laws of nature.

It came about in this manner: I was traveling in Germany two or three months ago, and, in an evil hour, it came into my head to go a hundred miles or thereabouts out of my way to make a call on an old college friend of mine, whom I had not seen in several years. That man was Jack Jenkins. In some romantic way he had be-come acquainted with and married a German girl of noble birth, a certain Fraulein Hilda von Waldeck. It was this insene idea of renewing an old friendship, and this particular idea always is insane, which submerged me in the sea of troubles from which I barely escaped with life and honor. Jenkins was the United States consul at Oldendorf, the residence town of the petty principality of Andel Schwartzburg. It was at Oldendorf that Jack met and married his wife. After the wedding the fair but obstinate Hilda declined to leave the place of her birth, and my friend made the best of it, secured his appointment as consul and settled down in this sleepy old German city.

Well, I arrived at Oldendorf after a

roundabout and tedious journey, and Jack, who expected me, was at the station and gave me what seemed a hearty welcome. For a few minutes I thought him the same frank, rough-and-ready, jovial chap whom I had always known; but I soon be-gan to notice something of a change in him. There seemed, at times, to be a sort of restraint in his manner; there struck me, often a false note in his discourse. He was more subdued and he seemed to have grown ten years older than he should have grown in the space of time since I had seen him last. His talk, like the letters he had written

me, was all of Hilda. It was Hilda ta's and Hilda that; there was never a creature like her, and I must go straightway with him and see her. Now, I was not particularly interested in Hilda, excepting as I naturally would be in something which belonged to a friend of mine. My benedick acquaintances have often bored me by detailing the perfections of their wives, and I suppose I have shown that I was bored and have been considered very unsympathetic and brutish; but what is a fellow to do, when he knows that these dotards, like the ancient mariner, speak from compulsion, and that seven-eighths of what they say is falsehood or only imaginary? I came there to see him, to talk with him about the old times ten years before, when we braked together, and I did not care a fig :bout Hilda; but, of course, I couldn't tell him so, and therefore he had his way and dragged me off at once to his house to meet his wife.

I shall say very little of Frau Hilda von Waldeck Jenkins, for the reason that she figures quite slightly in my tale. She was tall and not half bad looking, and I could easily see how a man of my friend's yielding and enthusiastic nature might imagine her to be an angel. I say imagine because, of course, you know, she vasn't; none of them are, and some of them are quite the

reverse.

So much for her appearance. As to her character, well, I will only say that scarce ten minutes had elapsed e'er I felt the most hearty commiseration for John Jenkins. The fact was that he was completely under petticoat rule. He gave no opinion, made no assertion without meanwhile glanding toward her for signs of her approval. The fact was, as I soon saw, that the man breathed only because he thought that it was her pleasure for him to do so.

Almost immediately after the first words of greeting, after the first ordinary and necessary remarks and questions, bachelor position was assaulted by treacherous friend; and in this he was ably seconded by his wife. He would have that I must marry at once, and he cited their ewn and irresistible argument. Would that he could have seen the irony of it! Not content with extracting a promise from me to the effect that I would think the matter over, they descended to the details and produced from their recollections German beauties, any one of whom would be a proper incumbrance for me. The whole assortment, properly arranged and labeled, was to be shown me upon the fol-

lowing afternoon.
"Not if a train leaves Oldendorf tomorrow morning," said I to myself.

After tea I gladly accepted Jack's invitation to go down to the market place and see a balloon ascension.
"You will not be long, love?" said Frau

Hilda, in a caressing tone, but with a pe-culiar glance in her eyes. "Only an hour, dearest," answered Jendns, and with that we went out.

After leaving the house Jack seemed to resume something of his old hearty man-ner, and I begin to think that I would be able to take some comfort with him. We threaded a labyrinth of narrow, ancient and crooked streets, and at length emerged upon the market place, which was almost filled with the people of the town, anxious,

like ourselves, to see the balloon go up. It was about 7 o'clock of an August evening. The air was balmy and the dusk was beginning to settle down. I thought it strange at first that any one should make an ascension at this hour, but it was no strange at all, for the balloonist was in the employ of the military authorities, and he purposed to make some experiments with electric searchlight, or some other kind of light, or burn some kind of tire, sult of which might be found useful in the military operations of the empire.

When we arrived they had about finished inflating the balloon, which was swaying back and forth above the heads of the people, in about the center of the square. We gradually pushed our way through the crowd until we came quite near to it, and I saw that it was rather small and capable of bearing aloft but one person. After a delay of fifteen or twenty minutes the aeronaut appeared and signified his readiness to make the ascension, but he did not go up. The balloon went up without waiting

It was a laughable accident, but I did not wonder at it. I must rather have been surprised if it had not happened. They had piled a number of bags of sand in the wicker car of the balloon to keep it down while they were inflating it, and, besides this, they had tethered it to a neighboring post with a rather small-sized rope or thick cord. These precautions they supposed to be perfectly adequate, and they perhaps would have been under ordinary circum-stances, but when the balloon was fully inflated and the aeronaut had removed eral of the sand bags into the car there came along a smart gust of wind, the great silk dome bobbed suddenly to one side, the rope which tethered the car broke like a plece of string and the machine was out of reach before any one had pressuce of

mind enough to seize it. mind enough to seize it.

For some reason or other, probably because it was weighted too heavily, it rose to an elevation of about a hundred feet; then it floated away over the neads of the populace, first this way and then that way as different puffs of wind took it; and the crowd scurried along in its wake, with

open, and a great many can up into the buildings and got out on the roofs, with the foolish idea that they might experie it.

Then it grew darker, and it was im-ossible any longer to distinguish the balloon from the clouds, and Jack and I, who had followed the rabble hither and touther in their erratic chase, gave the thing up and urned our steps homeward. Now, for the first time, we thought of looking at our watches, and Jenkins found

from his angel, as he persisted in ca'ling her; whereas he had promised to return in an hour. I gave the matter naturally no concern, but with my companion it was different. He fairly led me on a run to his louse. On the way he seemed to be distrait and preoccupied, he answered my re-marks at random, and it was very evident that there was a weight of goodly dimen-sions upon his mind. "Why," thought I, "will a man, who is born to the nobility of freedom, voluntarily, and the solution of the solu of freedom, voluntarily, yes, longingly, make a slave of himself to a creature in petticoats, so that he trembles at the anticipation of her displeasure?"

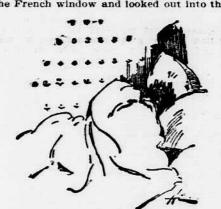
When we arrived at the house, Frau Jenkins received us calmly and with a sus-pictously gentle tone. With me she was coldly, but studiously, polite, and J, no-ticing that her manner had still further depressed my unhappy friend, took leave of the couple with ail haste possible, and, retiring to my chamber, threw off my clothes and crawled into bed, for I had had a trying day of it, and proposed to get a

good night's rest. It was not to be, for just then the Jenkinses commenced to talk. That is to say, the angel talked and the victim, once three or four minutes, gave out a faint and submissive monosyllable. Their chamber was evidently next to mine; the partitions were not over and above thick, and I could very well distinguish the tones, the manner and the inflection, without the world themselves were believed. words themselves reaching me. Her voice was low, it was plaintive, but at the same time insistent, and it was monotonous; and, ever and aron, came that one protesting, defensive and melancholy word from John Jenkins. At 10 o'clock I turned over toward the wall, and stuffed the sheet into my ears, and still I heard it.

Their door was opened and closed, and in that moment I heard the words: "Six months ago you would not have forgotten. If I could have believed mother—" the rest of the sentence being lost by the shut ting of the door. I arose and paced the floor in vexation, for the dull and wearing murmur of the voice gave no signs of abat More than aught else I fear a talking

woman, and in my misery, I yet gave thanks that I was not tethered to one. At 11 I flung myself upon the bed, and fell asleep and dozed awhile, and then the voices stopped, and I suddenly awoke, as one does on a steamship when the screw stops revolving. I felt a sense of blessed comfort, but it was only for a moment. She was apparently but resting. Once more that stream of words commenced to flow. She was off again. I noticed now that there came no response from the cul-prit. That meek and deprecating punctuation had ceased entirely. Was he dead The supposition was most plausible.

At 12 there was no change, and I arose and dressed myself completely and opened the French window and looked out into the



I Stuffed the Sheet Into My Ears.

night. In Oldendorf, some of the best and most aristocratic people lived in apart-ments over the shops, and my friend's apartments were so situated. My room was in the third story, and the French window, which I had opened, led out upon a flat roof, which was inclosed on three sides by brick walls, and the fourth side of which faced upon a street. I had noticed this roof and this area when I was in my chamber before tea. They seemed different to me now. There was something there which I had not seen them. The area now was almost filled with something vast and globular and vague and vascillating. I stepped out upon the roof and advanced toward this monster, which, as I approached, took the appearance of a great yellow rubber ball twelve feet and more in diameter; and it suddenly flashed upon me that I had found the runaway balloon.

I did not wonder at it, nor was I surprised. It was the most natural thing in the world. The roof was guarded on the street side by an iron fence or railing curiously wrought with leaves and spikes, and the balloon drifting that way, the cordage of the lower part had become entangled in this iron work, so that the aerial thip was safely housed and concealed be tween these three walls.

My first feeling was one of proprietor-ship. It was clearly mine by all the laws regarding salvage and treasure trove. It struck me, somehow, that the first thing to do was to untangle the rigging where it had caught and to get the thing ship shape. When it was wrecked, so to speak, upon the railing, several of the many cords which held the car had become unfastened or unhocked from the ring or hoop above and the car had tilted over, and had dumped its contents—eight bags of sand upon the roof. I righted the wicker can and disentangled several of the cords by which it should have hung, and refastened them to the hoop at the bottom of the balloon; then, as it was a warm night, and I was somewhat heated by the exertion, I took off my coat, and because it was the handlest place, threw it into the car. Very soon there remained but two of the cords to disengage from the ironwork. straining of the balloon made it so difficult that I threw one leg over the edge of the car and bore my weight upon it, so as to slacken the cords. Even then I could not get them off. So I took out my knife and teached down and cut them both with one stroke. The balloon was now free. I knew it, because in one second, it lifted me about

Part II.

This was not what I wished or intended. It was also not what I expected; but I did I should have known that if the balloon could carry eight twenty-five-pound bags of sand, or 200 pounds altogether, that there would be no difficulty about its getting away with me, who weighed something less than a hundred and seventy-five. The only trouble was that I did not think ol this fact until I had cut those last two cords, and all at once found myself floating over the house tops, with one arm and one leg thrown over the edge of the car and with both hands tightly gripping the

It only arose to an elevation of seventyfive or eighty feet from the ground; from which fact, I argued, that some of the gas had escaped; otherwise, the weight being would have been more buoyant and gone higher.

The wind had now changed, and the balloon jogged along at a pretty lively rate, in a direction which would soon bring it over the market place, from which it had originally started. I now thought I should be more comfortable if I could get into the car, and I made the effort to do so, but it was a ticklish operation, as I had to squeeze in between the cords which held it. Besides this, the car itself tilted over so abominably every time I tried to get into The wind had now changed, and the bal-

began to feel more at my ease, and really to find some pleasure in this, to me, novel mode of traveling. There was a full moon that night, but there were many clouds floating across the heavens, so that sometimes the streets below me were lighted up, and at other times were shrouded in darkness. I halooed at two or three belated pedestrians who were passing beneath me, and, noticing their astonishment and dismay at being thus hailed from the clouds above their heads, I took pains to accost others in the same manner. Two old ladies who were pledding homeward by the light of a lantern which one of them carried were so startled by this diabolical immons from the upper air that they dropped the light and took to their heels

In about five minutes I had passed be yend the town in a southerly direction, and in four or five minutes more I began to ficat above a dense black forest, which seemed limitless in extent. I had heard of a great forest thereabout, containing many square miles, a forest which was the domain of a strange and fierce old German noble, the Graf von Schreckenstrohm. This was undoubtedly it. It had descended to him directly from an ancestor, who lived in the thirteenth century; a feudal baron, who bore the sobriquet of "the wild boar of Schreckenstrohm." It was also said that the present Graf von Schreckenstrohm had inherited not only the forest and the great feudal castle which stood upon an island in the midst of the Schreckenstrohm, but also the peculiarities which gave to his ancestor that playful nickname. I was thinking about these matters as

as if they were competing in the Olympian

sailed along, at the rate of about twelve miles an hour, over the tops of the fir trees and pines. I was also thinking about Jack and his wife, and wondering what they would suppose of my sudden and uncere-monlous departure. I also wondered whether Mrs. Jenkins was still talking, and the thought of that made me quite contented with the peculiar situation in which found myself, though I was getting tire and felt very lame from sticking to the same position, and having to hold on so tightly; and would willingly have got off at some way station and rested until the next balloor After I had passed over the tops of the forest for a mile or so, I became conscious of the sound of a roaring river, which in-

creased in volume as I proceeded. Then



I Reached Down and Cut Them Both. there seemed to be a break in the woods foam of a mad and mighty torrent. At the same time there rose before me, from a rocky island in the midst of the flood, a great, half-ruined, mediaeval castle, with ound towers and turrets, with keep and barbacans and parapets galore. Gray and stern and specterlike it loomed up before me, and it seemed as though I was about directly over it.

direction which I was now taking would bring me immediately above a wide would bring me immediately above a wide embrasured parapet, which stretched be-tween two towers. At its present altitude, the balloon would clear it by but a few feet. I at once decided that this was the way station I was looking for, and that I would alight there. When I was within fifty feet of it I beheld a man in his shirt sleeves, standing behind this parapet and watching me approach. Some persons might have been astonished at this, but I will be a standard the standard that I have been astonished at this but I did not wonder at it in the least. There was no reason why he should not be standing on the roof of this castle at midnight

in warm weather, if he wished.

As the balloon came up to him, he sprang up and caught hold of the car. At the same mement I dropped like a cat, upon all fours, upon the roof. When I arose and turned to accost him, I beheld him coolly sitting in the car of the balloon, which was already passing over the battlements at the further side of the castle. I ran across the stone platform to the edge, and called out to him that he had my coat, and that he must come back. He waved his hand to me with exaggerated politeness. Then I shook my fist at him, and he laughed im-moderately and shouted back just as he was disappearing that I might use his.

I was not surprised that the man had gone off in the balloon. There was nothing to wonder at, for he might have had hi

wn peculiar and sufficient reasons for doing so. At the same time, however, I did not go to the length of supposing that he had climbed up on the top of the castle with the express purpose of watching for balloons, and with the idea of taking the first one that came along.

I now noticed a doorway opening upon the platform, from one of the great round towers before mentioned. The door was ajar, and I thought that it was probably by this neans that the man had come out upon the roof. I went to this doorway and look ed in. At first it was as dark as Erebus, but my eyes becoming accustomed to it. I



Beheld Him Calmly Sitting in the Car of the Balloon.

ing up from somewhere below. I also make out the outlines of a spiral staircese leading to these lower regions. Not being of the mind to remain where I was all night, I groped my way down these stairs, the light growing brighter as I proceeded, until, after descending, as it struck me, about 30 feet, I came to another open doorway, through which I entered a great bed chamber, furnished and decorated in the style of some age long passed away. The bed was a large four-posted, canopied affair, draped with heavy silken curtains. The tiled chimney place was big enough to roast an ox, and the walls were covered with stamped leather and with dingy tapestries, which flapped and undu-lated in a ghostly manner, with the current of air that came down the stairway. Upon not wonder at it, nor was I at all surprised. a massive table of black oak, in the center of the room, stood a silver candelabrum, with four wax candles, three of which were burning. A half unpacked portmanteau lay open upon a chair; several masculine gar-ments were scattered about the apartment, and these, together with a strong odor of tobacco, showed that the chamber had been lately occupied. From this to the conclusion that its tenant had been the man who had gone off in my balloon was a logical step. A brown velvet coat was among the garments already spoken of. This was undoubtedly the coat he had bade me use in place of mine. I tried it on, and found that it fitted me very well, which was not surprising, as the man appeared to be about my size. I should mention the fact also that I gathered from the short acquaintance I had with him that he was

about my age. There was only one thing that I now wanted, and that was sleep. I wanted it

tt that I soon gave up the idea and decided to ride it out as I was.

Being resigned to this situation, I now began to feel more at my ease, and really to find some pleasure in this, to me, novel mode of traveling. There was a full moon in the first structure in the structure of the premises. With the well-appointed paraphernalia of my predecessor, I made a correlate to the reason that I made a careful tollet; for the reason that I had become a guest of the castle under what might be considered somewhat peculiar circumstances, and I wished to create as favorable an impression as possible

upon my first appearance.

When I had finished, I summoned to my



I Looked Bown a Long Passageway. aid what small stock of effrontery I was possessed of, and entering the staircase of the tower and descending to the story beneath, I passed into an apartment directly under the one I had occupied. This room was light and airy, and from the view which I got from the windows, I now judged that I was upon the ground floor. This chamber seemed to be devoted to im-plements and trophies of the chase. Several pairs of antlers, some of them of enormous size, were posted about the doorways; the head of a wild boar, with glistening tusks, was mounted above a cabinet in the fur ther corner, and upon one of the walls was displayed an assortment of muskets, bellmouthed pistols and blunderbusses and hunting pikes and blades, so ancient and curious that it would make a collector

burst with envy to look at it. Without lingering to inspect them, I opened a door opposite to the one I had entered and found myself in what appeared to be a refectory of the castle. The walls were covered with landscape paintings, as it seemed to me from a cursory glance, by the best German artists of the seventeent century; but that which most pleased my fancy was a breakfast table in the cente of the room, spread with linen of snowy whiteness, set with a profusion of silver, and best of all, furnished with a collation, smoking hot, and evidently prepared for one person.

As I entered here, I was certain that I saw a door close at the farther end of the room. I stepped quickly to this door and pened it, and looked down a long passage way without seeing any one. Then I went along this passage and entered several pantries and offices, still without coming upon a living thing, and I began to be per-plexed, for all this time I had not heard a sound, save the dashing of the torrent against the rocks outside, and I was not accustomed to being waited upon by ghosts. I now concluded that the closing of the op-posite door, as I entered the room, was done by the pressure of air. As I pushed one door open the other one closed. That was all there was of it, and it was a most I was not surprised when I found the

meal already prepared and waiting for me. There was nothing to wonder at. It had. without doubt, been gotten ready for the man. When they heard me moving about in my chamber, they supposed he was com-ing down and had placed it upon the table. I had his coat upon my back, and it seemed to me eminently logical that his breakfast should adorn my stomach. With this philosophical reflection, I sat down and made short work of the fruit and coffee and rolls. And though set before me in such a fantastic and ghostly way, very tangible and satisfying and delicious 4 found them. After I had finished I lighted a cigar and lounged about the room for ten min-

utes or so, thinking surely that some servant would come whom I might interrogate. But none appeared; neither did I hear the least sound indicative of life in that part of the building near me. I then went up in my own apartment, as I had begun to think it, and examined the belongings of its late occupant. On looking at the port-manteau I found that it bore upon the out-side the initials: "A. von D., Munich." At about this moment also I discovered in one of the pockets of the coat which I wore a letter, the envelope of which was post-marked Oldendorf and addressed to Herr August von Dunkelheim at Munich. I had now discovered without doubt the name about the castle and its inmates, always providing that it had any. I, however, restrained myself from taking the letter from its envelope, reserving the right to do so at some future time should occasion war-

Coming out of my chamber, I noticed a door on the opposite side of the landing. I opened it and found myself in a large apartment with stone floors and stonevaulted roof. Passing through this I came into a long corridor, similarly finished, in which there were a number of casements or loopholes. Thrusting my head through one of these apertures, I saw ahead of me a great hexagonal tower, thirty or forty feet in diameter; then passing through a doorway at the end of the passage I entered a hallway of hexagonal shape, and from that I knew that I was now in the six-sided tower which I had seen from the window. This hallway was lighted by a shaft from above, and in its center was a winding stairway leading to the lower story. In its six sides there were six doorways leading into as many bed rooms. I examined each of these chambers in and found them all notably alike. same richly stained mullion windows were in all of them; the same delicately fres-coed walls and ceilings, the same luxurious rugs and Louis Quinze movables. In each room there was a quaint and narrow bed with the whitest of counterpanes, the softest of mattresses and the downiest of pillows. I tried one of them, like little Silver Hair in the house of the three bears; then seeing how I had disarranged it I felt exceedingly guilty, and with haste and as silently as possible I withdrew to my own part of the chateau.

Again descending the tower staircase to the bottom and turning to the left, instead of to the right, I passed through a spa-cious, vaulted passages, and coming to a great pair of oaken doors, I opened one of them without much trouble, and found my-self upon a carved stone porch, which led down into a courtyard. In this open space I walked about and surveyed at my ease the castle and its surroundings. It would ing, or collection of buildings, as more properly it might be called. It was a con glomeration of feudal Gothic and Moorish architecture; towers round and square,



The Sight of Six Young Damsels. great battlemented walls, turrets and donjon keeps, and all that sort of thing. And

it, crumbling and discolored with time and almost covered with ivy, looked as though it were a thousand years old, while other parts seemed new and comfortable and showed the marks of present occupancy.

Outside the castle and the court ther rose a stone wall about eight feet in height rose a stone wall about eight feet in height, continuous save opposite the castle porch, where there was a break or gap, some fifteen feet in width, or wider. This gap had originally been filled by two huge gates of wrought and twisted iron, which, now rusted from their hinges, lay back on either side against the wall. Through this open space I could see the black swirling. epen space I could see the black swirling flood of the Schreckenstrohm go sweeping by; and beyond the water a wagon road that wound up the hill through the forest. Advancing to this aperture in the masonry, I found some stone steps leading down into the water, and looking up the stream I noticed something else, which struck me as remarkably odd, namely, a rope of iron wire, which, coming from the highest casement in a tall tower, which rose some fifty feet from where I stood, stretched across the river and disappeared in the tree tops on the opposite side. I climbed to the top of the outer wall without much trouble, and walking upon it for several hundred feet, I passed around the upper end of the castle and of the island, and now was able to get a much better idea of both, and of the plunging river or torrent which swept down, about sixty feet in width, on either side. I now looked in vain for any means of communication between the castle and the main land. The flood was so deep and the cur-rent so furious, as it pounded against the rocky banks, that crossing in a boat was utterly impossible, and the question of how was to get away became more and more of an enigma. The island seemed to be about two hundred feet in width and some five or six hundred in length. It was completely encircled at its outer edge by the wall upon which I walked, excepting for the open space I have mentioned. The castle stood at the lower end of the inclosure. By lower end I mean, of course, the part down stream. And the whole of the remaining ground, for five hundred feet perhaps above the buildings, was covered with trees and shrubbery, very dense in some places, and at one point through the leaves and branches I caught sight of a flower garden and what seemed to be the white spray of a fountain my way through a labryinth of foliage that I might satisfy myself about the matter, and suddenly coming into an open



you are."

space a most secluded sylvan spot there burst upon my gaze a sight which would have surprised me and set me wondering If such a thing were possible. The sight, namely, of six young damsels, all of them handsome, and two or three of them pass-ing anything I had seen, both in face and figure, in that quality which is called beauty. They were sitting upon seats or reclining upon the turf. They were sitting upon rustic of them were reading. The others, in various dolce far niente attitudes, were day dreaming or gazing at the sky or otherwise killing time. They were of different ages, the oldest not over twenty and the youngest not less than fifteen. Though each had some trait of feature color or expression, which distinguished her from the others, there was in their general appearance which led me to believe that they were sisters. They were alike and yet unlike. And that which pleased me in-finitely mere than all the rest was the fact that they were not saying anything. had not noticed my approach, but presently one of them looked up and saw me. She immediately sprang to her feet. This drew the attention of the others to me. A second one followed the example of the first, and these two, hurriedly picking up something from the ground, darted away into the shrubbery. As they fled I perceived the twinkling of bare white feet, and one of them let fall a tiny shoe upon the grass. Their forms were so sin-

uous, so perfectly molded, and their mo-tions so quick and graceful, that they seemed more like wood nymphs than like human beings. The remaining four raised themselves now discovered without doubt the name of the man who had stolen my balloon, and by reading the letter I feit morally certain that I could find out a great many things about the castle and its inmates always without the castle and its inmates always with the castle and its included and its inmates always with the castle and its inmates al

"You will please pardon me, young la-dies, for intruding upon you, but you are the first persons I have seen upon the island. I arrived here last night, and I wish to pay my respects to the master of the house. Will you kindly tell me where I can find him?" The four girls girply leeked at of the house. Will you kindly tell me where I can find him?" The four girls simply looked at each other and smiled. Then they gazed at me again, without ut-tering a syllable in reply.

I thought their conduct somewhat peculiar, but I made as though I did not notice it, and said:

"You are the daughters of the proprietor, are you not?" All four nodded emphatically, then looked at each other and smiled again.



Lay at Length Upon the Green Turf. "The other two who fled as I approached, are they your sisters?" Once more they nodded simultaneously, "I have heard that the castle of Schreck-

me if this be it?"

They gave the same affirmative sign. Then the one to whom I particularly addressed my questions, she seeming to be the oldest, turned to her sisters and raised her eyebrows in a sarcastic manner. "The Herr Graf von Schreckenstrohm is then your happy father. Will you conde-scend to tell me whether he is at home?" This time they all shook their heads, and they were so decided about it that I thought they would never get through shaking them. Here was a very odd kind of a reception. I had never had such an experience before. The expression upon the faces of these young women was more than ordinarily intelligent and lively, and they could answer my questions with nothing but nods and shakings of the head. Perhaps they were trying to have some amusement out of me. I would be facetious in my turn.

"Are all the people on the island dumb?" For answer they nodded slowly. They no longer smiled, and their countenances took on a tinge of sadness. When I asked the question I did not suspect that such was the reality. Their manner now made me think seriously that I had hit upon the truth. But I could not wholly believe it

"My dear young ladies, do you mean to affirm, really and truly, that you are all mute? That none of you can articulate a

They nodded still more sorrowfully than before; and the oldest one, for whom I had begun to have something of a liking, cast her eyes down, and they seemed to be filled with moisture. I had now come to the experinece which prompted me to write this story. These were "the six dumb belles of Castle Schreckenstrohm." In the title I did not, it is true, use exactly this form of spelling, but it was intentional; for how otherwise could I sum up and picture the chief episode of the narrative without

ed, properly stockinged and shod, and the ed, properly stockinged and shod, and the whole six—representing every possible charm and beauty which the human female, from the age of fifteen to twenty, possessed—standing and sitting, were grouped around me in a radiant semicircle. I gazed at them one after the other, in ecstatic rapture. Here are six girls, thought I, each one of them in her way as lovely as a dream, rot one of whom can speak a word. I remembered the dainty breakfast which I had eaten that morning, and at once the old adage came morning, and at once the old adage cam to me that the perfect woman is she who can cook but who cannot talk. Here was not one perfect woman only, but half a dozen of them. The gardinen Predigt of Frau Hilda von Waldeck Jenkins was still fresh in my memory, and I declare that if such a thing had been possible I would mmediately and incontinently have faller

in love with the whole six.

I was now upon the point of asking whether they had been born mute or had become so after birth, because I was anxious to a second the second to be a second ous to ascertain the locality where, and the means by which, such families or races of females were produced-with the idea of giving the information to my friends for their good and the general benefit of humanity. I, however, refrained from in terrogating them upon the subject, as it was a delicate one and might put them to unnecessary pain.
"Young ladies," said I, "I am very glad

to have you say so. No, I do not mean that, of course I am sorry—that is to say, I am glad that you can, at least, hear so distinctly. It will now give me pleasure to tell you who I am, and to describe the odd way in which I came here.'

oldest maiden, whom I by this time fancied exceedingly, a tall brunette, with a slender but perfect figure, large, dark, melancholy eyes, a creamy complexion and wealth of dark, glossy brown locks, at this produced from behind her a writing pad with pencil attached. After tearing off a page which had been scribbed upon, she wrote upon the pad and gave it to me. The hardwriting was full of character and was charmingly feminine. I at Oldendorf, three days h read as fellows:

"We know who you are and how you came, and the errand upon which you came.

Before handing it to me she had shown

it to the girls nearest her. They now watched my face, and glanced at each other with looks of mischlevous amusement. I was somewhat nonplussed. They were either bent on mystifying me, or they took me for some one else.

"Then," said I, "you have been told by
Frau Jenkins, and you saw the balloon
last night when it passed over the castle."

The Schreckenstrohm ladies looked wonderingly at each other, and my particu-lar favorite snatched the pad and wrote

as follows: We have heard nothing from Frau Jenkins, though we are acquainted with a lady of that name in the city. Neither do we know what you mean by that nonsense about the balloon. We know that you are Herr von Dunkelbeim of Munich, and that pap brought you here last night after we were ail in bed."

"Mesdemoiselles Schreckenstrohm," cried. "You were never more mistaken in your life. I am not Herr von Dunkelheim. My name is Julius Waterbury. Von Dun-kelheim has left the island, and I did not come with your father and have not seem Her eyes had a strange light in them as she seized the pad and again wrote upon

"Then how did you get here?" Impressively, and with exact detail, I narrated the manner of my arrival at the castle and of Von Dunkelheim's departure from it. I have never seen incredulity so fully and unmistakably depicted on the human cuntenance as it was upon the pretty faces of the six countesses. One of them an ethereal blonde creature of about seventeen, thrust a little hand into a reticule which hung suspended from her belt, pro-duced a letter, unfolded it and handed it to ne-at the same time, with triumphant air. pointing to the opening paragraph with a taper index finger. I took the letter and read aloud the following words: "Dearest Ysolde: I learned today that my

rother-in-law's brother, August von Dunkelheim, is to visit you and the rest of my cousins at the castie. As you have never seen him, yo: will doubtless wish to know semething about him. In the first place you must not believe a word he says, for l



She Looked at Me With Glance.

know it to be a fact that he is the greatest Ear in all Europe.

Part IV.

I looked up at this point, and caught the maidens smiling at each other and giving that peculiar downward and upward twist of the head which signifies-"right she is, you may depend upon it." I now turned to the last part of the letter, which read as follows: "Give my best love to Brunhilda, Wanda, Gutrune, Undine and Lorelei, and believe me your affectionate cousin, Ermengarde." I then looked at the date, and found that the epistle had been written

only the day before. Here was a pleasant situation to be placed in. My narrative and the reputation of the expected guest fitted together too perfectly. In their minds, I was the prevaricator, Von Dunkelheim, and I felt that I should remain so, unless some for-tuitous circumstance should arise to establish my identity. The villain had not only run away with my balloon and my coat, but he had also stelen my character. "When and how did this letter come?" asked I, as I handed the sylph-like and golden-haired Ysolde her missive She took the pad from her dark-eyed sister and wrote:

"This morning by the trolley car." She evidently meant to pay me in what she supposed to be my own coin. I smiled her nonsense, and then I asked her another question: "You said that your papa, Count von Schreckensthrom, came here last night, after you had all retired. How did he cross the river to the castle?" enstrohm stands hereabouts. Can you tell

"By the stone bridge, of course. You ald know, as you were with him," wrote Ysolde. "But I have been all around the island,

and have seen no bridge." These words of mine seemed to produce a great deal of merriment. Some of the damsels plainly snickered, and one, the youngest of the six, whom I afterward found was Lerelei, a blue-eyed, haired little witch of fifteen, actually winked at her sisters.
"Oh, you can't see it now, you know,"
were the words which Ysolde now wrote

were the words which Ysolde now wrote upon the pad.

"Oh, I see," said I. "The stone bridge is like the trolley car. Now you see it and now you don't. Such a bridge as that is not solid enough for me. Give me a balloon every time."

"Yes," wrote the girl, "but your balloon is notsense, and the car and the bridge are true. You can see the car yourself, when it comes tomorrow morning, and you can also see the bridge when

ng, and you can also see the bridge when papa arrives."
"And when is your papa, the Herr Graf, coming, most fair and charming Grafin? "In a week from yesterday, unless some-thing happens, which is not at all likely,"

was her answer.

I now began to get along famously with the six beiresses of Schreckenstrohm. They were a joily set, take them all to-gether, though I do not mean by that that they were all of them of a mirthful and waggish disposition, like the flaxen-haired and childish Lorder, or the blande and nymph-like Ysolde. Brunhilda, the eldest and children Lotelet, or the blonde and nymph-like Ysolde. Brunhilda, the cldest of them all, the maid who pleased me most, was of a serious and contemplative character, her smile was the sweetest, the looks from her unfathomable eyes were the tenderest, and her nature, all in all, like the beauty of her face and form, was more perfect and product was more perfect and mature. The next in age, whom I afterward found to be Wanda, was of a languishing and sentimental cast. Then came Gatrane, a black-haired, gray-eyed sphil of cichten,

dine, as elf-like, immaterial and changeful as the creation of Baron Pouque.

There was a romance, a strangeness, a wildness about the whole affair which faswildness about the whole affair which fas-cinated and enthralled me. The welrd and almost miraculous way in which I had alighted upon the spot, the feudal castle, the roaring torrent and the six beautiful countesses were like the images of a fairy tale. There was, besides, the charm of that still and shady glade, and a charm in the unfathomable mystery which en-veloped the island, the castle and its occu-pants. And, above all, there was the pants. And, above all, there was the charm of solitude, which the presence of these speechless giris made greater than if I had been alone. I was like an Adam in a garden with six voice-less Eves, and I would have been immeasurables. urably content had they not still persisted in believing me to be the recreant Von Dunkelheim.

They wandered with me through the island and with childish pleasure showed me all their favorite nooks and corners. I lay at length upon the green turf, by the hour, and watched their graceful torms and lovely faces, as they strolled past me, or as they sat near by upon a mossy bank. They plucked for me rare exotic flowers from the garden, and side by side we gazed into the fountain where into the fountain, where, as I now learned to the confusion of the culprits, Lorelei and Undine were wont to wade barefooted. We then explored the castle through and through. We descended into the bottom of the deepest donjon; we clambered over the tops of the highest battlements; we climbed up into every tower, and we perched our-selves within every turret, so that there was no part of the strange and venerable pile with which I was not familiar. After the abominable injuries which I had suffered at the hands of Von Dunkelheim I naturally felt no longer any compunctions of conscience about reading his letter. Before the afternoon had passed, watching my chance to open it unobserved, I had made myself master of its contents, and the nature of my discoveries made me glad that I had done so. The letter was from at Oldendorf, three days before, and ran as follows:

"My Dear August: Once more I have had to imprison my six daughters in the Castle of Schreckenstrohm, and there they shall stay until they come to their senses. You know, of course, about their peculiar infirmity. It has grown upon them since their mother's death, until I cannot bear them longer in the house with me. I am determined to marry them off, come what will, and you shall have your choice from the half dozen. It is for this that I have sun mened you to Oldendorf. I shall meet you at the station with my carriage and take you immediately to the castle. you shall stay until one of them, I care not which, consents to become your wife. I have certain claims upon you, as you know, and shall expect you at six on

Thursday night. "SCHREKENSTROHM."

I read this letter with emotions of min-gled horror and rage. This inhuman mon-ster, so aptly named the wild bear, imprisoned his inoffensive and lovely chil-dren in this melancholy castle; treated them like malefactors, and for what? Sole-ly, forsouth, because their sad infirmity, their lack of speech, annoyed him. I hated him for it from my inmost heart, and I also hated him for the coarse and cruel way in which he had set this von Dunkelheim upon them. It was like opening the gates and turning the wolf into the pasture after the lambs. The only thing that perplexed ne was the question: Why had von Dunkelheib. kelheim run away? When the day had almost gone we dined

together, in the same chamber where I had caten the mysterious breakfast. This was also a strange experience; three damsels on either side of me at table, and I doing all the talking. Here it was that I discovered that there was still another person upon the island. Dame Geiskopf, a deaf and dumb old woman, half servant half companion or governess, who in some remote and undiscoverable part of the castle concocted and evolved dishes worthy "Trois freres provenceaux." of the was a flaw in my theories; the six count-esses had not cooked my breakfast, after all. I, however, comforted myself with the reflection that undoubtedly they might have done so had they wished.

Shortly after we had dined we all re-paired to a large and magnificently furnished ralon adjoining the hexagonal tower of the six bed rooms, and there I passed a most pleasant evening. It is true that the old duenna, Frau Geiskopf, stole into the room a few minutes after we had taken possession of it, and, seating herself at one end of the chamber, bolt upright and immovable, gazed upon us with the un-winking place of the basilisk. But it mat tered little to me, for she was as deaf as the countesses were dumb, and before her very face I made the most flattering and tender speeches to them all; at the same time, however, singling out as the object of my most fervid and affectionate attentions that dark-eyed, statuesque and thoughtful beauty, the peerless Brunhilda, with whom I must confess I was, even at that early stage of the proceedings, most desperately in love.

The salon contained, besides luxurious oriental furniture and exquisite paintings, a number of musical instruments-zithers. lutes and mandolins-from which at times the six maidens, singly or by twos and threes, produced for my entertainment the most delightful harmonies. "What a con-trast," thought I, "to the modern function, where one hears only the cackling of a score of shrill-voiced women." Later in the evening refreshments-fruits and cakes and wine-were by ught in and served by Undine and Ysoide, and, as I sat there, half reclining upon a huge divan of some eastern material, ministered to by these ethereal and silent liebes-while three others of the Syren band clustered around me in tantalizing proximity, and still others struck from zither and mando-in the most heavenry strains of Schubert and Mendeisschn and Schumann-I r minded myself of Abou Hassan in th "Arabian Nights," where he finds himself suddenly transformed into the Caliph hia-roun Alraschid, and is waited upon and entertained by the twenty lovely olu-lisques of the five chambers; "Eyes' de-sire" and "Fleart's selight" and "Light of

day," and all the rest of them.

At 10 o'clock precisely the old ogre of a chaperon, Dame Geiskopf, arose and made a motion of authority, and immediately the six daughters of the Graf von Schreckenstrohm dropped their occupations and sprang up and prepared to retire. They gathered round me and took my hand af ectionately, and, bidding me goor ai, ht in their mute pantomime, followed the duenna out of a small door at one side of the apartment. Brunhilda was the last to go. She turned in the doorway and looked at me with a loughing glance. I kissed my hand to her, and I thought she did the same to me, but she shut the door so quickly hat I was not certain of it.

Part V.

On the morning of the next day I arose betime and made a hasty toilet. I hurried downstairs in search of my hostesses. I found them in the courtyard of the castle, and was pleased to notice that their greet-ing was fully as amiable as was their leave-taking the night before. While I was standing among them, saying to them all the pretty compliments and agreeable things I could think of, some great, black, heavy body or object or mass darted out of the tops of the forest opposite us, went whizzing and rattling over our heads, and disappeared over the castle before I had a I was not surprised at the transit of this

black something; neither did I wonder at it, for I had made up my mind to expect anything after what had already happened. I was, however, taken off my guard by the suddenness of it, and I cried

What is that?" The six damsels seemed very much amused at the start which I gave and at my sudden exclamation.
"That," wrote Ysolde upon her pad, "is

the trolley car about which I told you. If you will follow us up into the signal tower we will now show it to you." They pointed out the tower in question.
It was the one, from the window of which came the wire rope which extended across the river into the forest. The rope itself was even now vibrating as if it had been fercibly shaken. I saw at once the truth of the matter. The car about which they spoke ran along upon this rope and into the casement of the signal tower. There was truly nothing to wonder about in this matter, for it was really a very simple thing, an ordinary mechanical contrivence, and that was all. I now conjectured whether the invisible bridge might not develop into some equally everyday affair. These last reflections came to me while I was following, as best I could, the six sylph-like forms of the countesses, who had started upon a wild chase or race into the tower and up the staircase, as though each

one was trying to get to the top first. When I at last arrived, very much winded, on the uppermost floor. I found them all gathered around a large wicker-work car or basket about two and a half feet in depth and width and four feet in length. what made it seem more incongruous was that a considerable portion of it had been remodeled and made habitable in a comparatively modern way. A great part of